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978-0-521-70464-9 - A Death in Oxford
Richard MacAndrew
Excerpt
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Chapter 1 *Friday 26 July: 6.30 am*

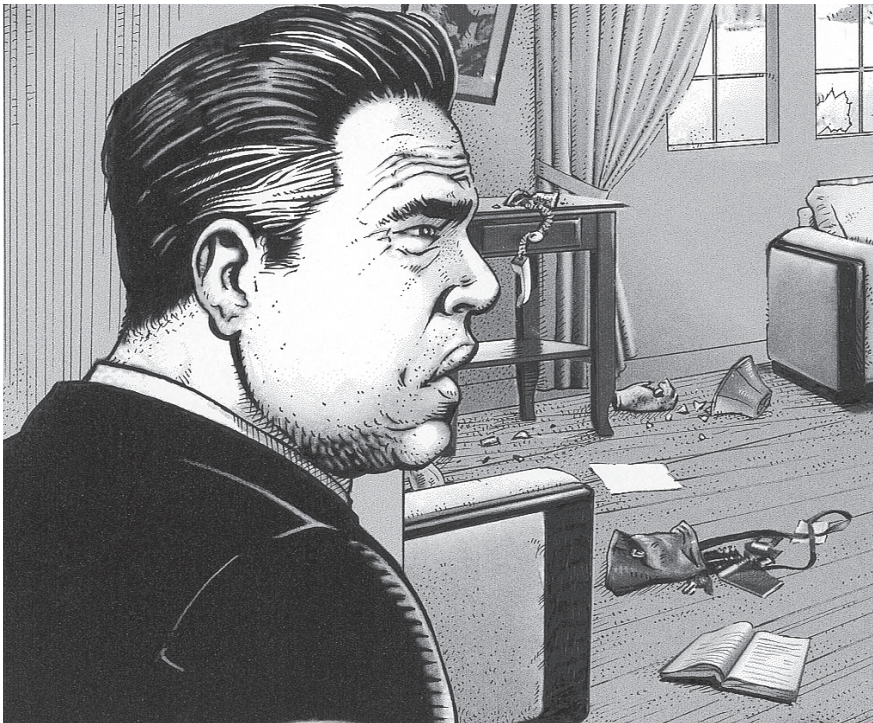
It's six thirty in the morning. Inspector Frank Williams of the Oxford police is in bed. He hears his phone and answers it.

'Williams,' he says.

'It's Kate Miller, Inspector. I'm at 17B St John Street, the house of a Dr Janet Leighton. She's dead.'

'I'm coming,' says Williams. 'Give me fifteen minutes.'

At six forty-five Williams walks into the front room of



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a tall house on St John Street. He stops. There are books and papers everywhere, and a body next to the coffee table.

Sergeant Kate Miller is by the window. She's waiting for him. There's a police scientist in the room too.

'What's all this?' asks Williams.

'Someone wanting money or things to sell, I think,' says Miller. 'This is Dr Leighton's computer table – but there's no computer. And there's her bag.'

Williams looks down at the body. It's the body of a fifty-year-old woman: dark trousers and a white shirt, with a lot of red.

Miller speaks again: 'And there's this.' In her hand is a bag, and in the bag is a knife.



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'Ah,' says Williams. He looks slowly at the room again. He looks at the Chinese dog. He turns it over.

'What do you think, Sergeant?' he asks.

'Someone gets into the house to take things,' she says. 'Dr Leighton tries to stop them, but maybe there's a knife on the table and ...' She stops speaking.

Williams says nothing for a minute. He looks at the Chinese dog again.

'I don't know,' says Williams.

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He turns to the police scientist. ‘Jenkins,’ he says, ‘can I have a photograph of this dog?’

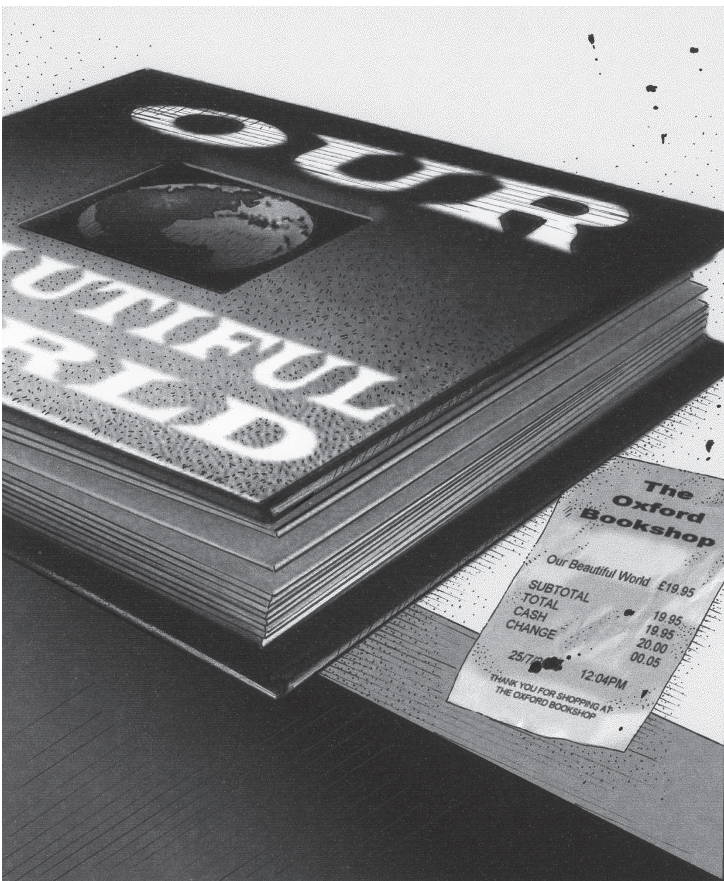
‘OK, Inspector,’ says the scientist.

Williams looks at the book on the coffee table.

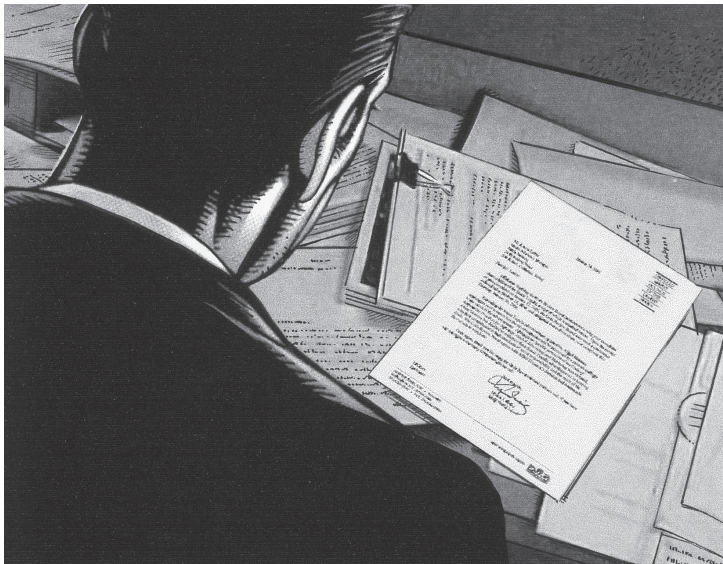
‘*Our Beautiful World.*’ He reads the name of the book. ‘Photographs from all over the world.’

There’s a receipt by the book. He looks at that.

‘It’s a new book, too,’ he says.



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Next, Williams looks at the papers on the computer table. One is a letter. He reads it.

‘Interesting,’ he says. ‘It’s about Dr Leighton’s will, from her lawyer. I want to know about her will. Now she’s dead, who gets her money? A husband? Children?’

Miller comes over and reads the letter.

‘The lawyer’s name is Elizabeth Morgan, of Morgan and Freebody Lawyers,’ she says. ‘We can talk to her this morning.’

‘Yes,’ says Williams, ‘but first I want to see a Dr Barbara Collins.’ Miller looks at Williams, but he turns to the scientist. ‘Jenkins, can you come and see me this afternoon?’

‘OK, Inspector,’ says the scientist.

‘You can tell me all about this room then,’ says Williams. ‘And about the knife.’

Williams turns to Miller: ‘OK, Sergeant, we can go.’

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‘Who’s Dr Barbara Collins?’ asks Miller. Williams and Miller are in Williams’ car. They’re driving up the Woodstock Road. It’s a beautiful Oxford street with trees and houses to the left and the right.



‘You’re new in Oxford, I know,’ says Williams. ‘But don’t you read the *Oxford Post*?’

‘I don’t have time,’ answers Miller.

Williams turns left into Frenchay Road and stops in front of a big house.

He looks at Miller and smiles.

‘Well, a lot of people in Oxford know Dr Collins ... and Dr Leighton.’

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Chapter 2 *Thursday 25 July: 9.30 am*

Barbara Collins' story



'What's this?' asks Barbara Collins angrily. She's a tall woman with long dark hair. There's a paper in her hand. It's the *Oxford Post*. She reads from it.

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Journalist Darren Atkinson speaks to Dr Janet Leighton, of the Leighton Clinic on Banbury Road.

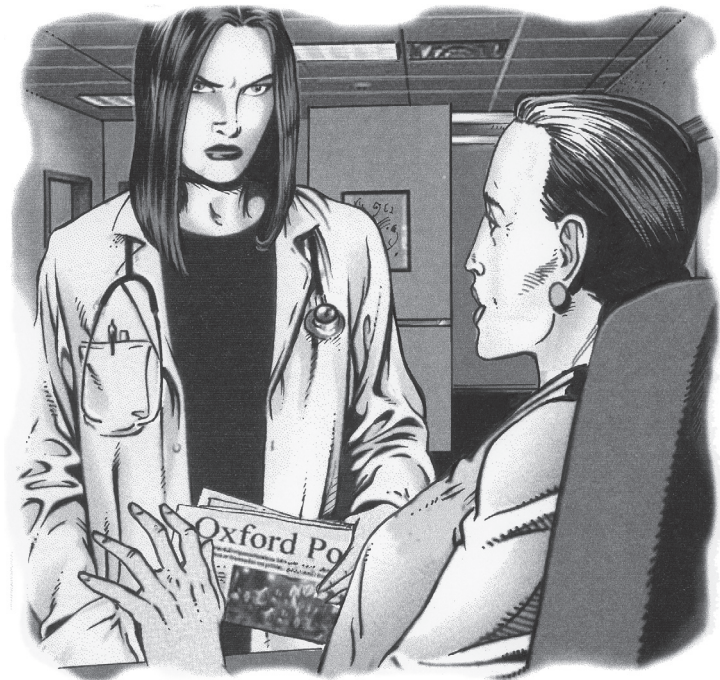
‘The clinic is having a bad time, but we’re not closing,’ says Dr Leighton. ‘Clinics are expensive and we always need money. This year we’re asking some of our doctors to leave.’

One of these doctors is Dr Barbara Collins. Oxford people know Dr Collins well. She answers their questions every week in the *Oxford Post*.

‘We’re sorry Dr Collins is leaving,’ says Dr Leighton, ‘but we need doctors at our clinic, not writers.’

Barbara Collins’ face is red. ‘What’s all this?’ she asks angrily. ‘I know nothing about this. You take away my job and you tell the *Oxford Post* first, not me.’

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‘Barbara, Barbara,’ says Janet Leighton. She puts up a hand. ‘Stop. You know that the clinic needs money. And you’re expensive.’

‘It’s not the money, is it?’ says Barbara.

‘I’m sorry?’ says Janet.

‘It’s not the money, it’s the writing,’ says Barbara. ‘I write for the *Oxford Post* and you don’t like that.’

‘What are you talking about?’ asks Janet.

‘There can’t be two famous people at the Leighton Clinic,’ says Barbara, ‘can there? There can only be one. You.’

Janet says nothing.

‘I hate you,’ says Barbara. She puts the paper on the table, then turns and leaves the room.

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Chapter 3 *Friday 26 July: 9.00 am*



‘Thank you for talking to us, Dr Collins,’ says Williams.
‘Tell me – are you the only person to hate Dr Leighton?’

Barbara laughs. ‘No, Inspector. No,’ she says. ‘Not at all.’

Williams and Miller say nothing. They wait for Barbara Collins to speak again.

‘There’s her husband.’ She laughs again. ‘Of course, he doesn’t live with her now. And her son.’

Williams and Miller leave.

On the street Miller asks, ‘Where now?’

‘Elizabeth Morgan, the lawyer, first,’ says Williams. ‘Then the husband and son.’